

CONCUSSION IN CHILDREN

What is a Concussion?

A concussion, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury occurs from a blow to the head, heavy tackle, collision or violent shaking. It is important to remember that a child can sustain a concussion without losing consciousness.

If a child is concussed, TAKE IT SERIOUSLY!!

When a child is conscious after a blow to the head, take the child to the sick bay.

Assess, call family - keep the child awake.

If the child is unconscious, make the child comfortable - call an ambulance immediately. Call the family - stay with the child until the ambulance arrives.

If a child's condition has deteriorated, some immediate signs that a child has sustained a concussion include:

- Has a headache that gets worse
- Is very drowsy or can't be woken up
- Passes out or has a blackout
- Vomits more than 3 times
- Can't recognise places or people
- Behaves unusually or seems confused
- Is very irritable
- Slurs speech
- Has weak arms or legs, or is unsteady on feet
- Have seizures
- If they sleep rouse them half hourly during the first 4 hours

Children should not go back to school until all symptoms have disappeared:

- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Double or blurred vision
- Confusion
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Memory problems
- Sleep difficulties
- Irritability
- Sensitivity to noise, light and ringing in ears.

DIFFICULTIES COMMONLY EXPERIENCE AFTER A CONCUSSION AND HOW TO MANAGE THESE:

Fatigue and headaches are very common following a head injury. The need for rest and sleep is increased and the student will have less energy and tire more quickly. They are likely to experience headaches due to tiredness, excessive noise and after periods of concentration.

The child may show signs of:

- Being obviously tired, yawning in class
- Being passive or withdrawn
- Drifting off task, 'switching off' and day dreaming
- Deteriorating behaviour as they become more fatigued.

How you can assist:

- Encourage a gradual return to school starting with only a couple of hours initially, building to half and then full days as tolerated
- Recognise that the child may tire quickly and provide opportunities to rest as needed.

Cognitive problems are also very common and may impact on the child's ability to learn. These problems can include but are not limited to:

- Memory problems
- Attention/concentration difficulties
- Slowed thinking
- Problem solving
- Decreased comprehension
- Poor organisation
- Visual and/or auditory processing problems.

The child may show signs of:

- Finding it difficult to stay on task
- Being easily distracted
- Having difficulty completing work
- Forgetting what they have been asked to do, so need instructions to be repeated or written down
- Problems organising their approach to tasks
- Finding it hard to get started on tasks
- Difficulty with problem solving
- Problems expressing their thoughts clearly, either verbally or in writing.

How you can assist:

- Provide a quiet learning environment
- Seat the child near the teacher and away from windows, doors and talkative children to reduce distractions

- Maintain a structured and consistent routine
- Provide written instructions for multi step tasks
- Ask the child to repeat information back to you to check they have understood
- Provide extra opportunities to practice new skills
- Provide more time for the completion of tasks
- Identify how the child learns best and provide learning opportunities in this mode
- Be flexible in your expectations
- Ask for assistance from other agencies as required.

Behavioural and emotional problems

Head injury can cause changes in the way people behave. Pre-existing personality traits can be accentuated by the injury and children are frequently less able to control their emotions and behaviour and may exercise poor judgement while they are recovering from a head injury.

The child may show signs of:

- Restlessness and/or hyperactivity
- Being more passive and withdrawn
- Increased irritability and/or frustration
- Anger outbursts, increased aggression, challenging or more defiant behaviour
- Mood swings, emotional outbursts
- Being impulsive and saying or doing inappropriate things like swearing
- Talking more or sometimes less.

How you can assist:

- Maintain a structured routine with clear expectations of appropriate behaviours
- It is important to recognise the head injury as the cause of the behavioural problems and not to label the child as a behaviour problem
- Be aware of the fatigue factor and build in regular rest breaks
- Discuss and reinforce the rules regularly.

When can children return to sport/PE?

It is important to avoid further injury. Vigorous activities including contact sports and playing on playground equipment should be avoided until the child has been free of symptoms for a week. Concussion can affect their coordination and reflexes, which puts them at risk of another injury if they return to sport too soon. If in doubt seek clearance from their GP or other health professionals involved.